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ABSTRACT

Studies seem to indicate that preparation for retirement is the key to its success. Planning includes these basic ingredients: (1) maintaining regular health habits; (2) role flexibility--the retiree needs a healthy self image not bound to the self-as-worker; (3) activity that is constructive and personally meaningful; and (4) continuance of social life. Contrary to popular myths, most retirees do not move (only 5% do), retirement is not necessarily a precursor of poverty, nor is it a source of stress and mental illness for most people. Recommendations for successful retirement include peer counseling, "phasing into" the process gradually, and realistic assessment of present and future financial situations. Are there opportunities for retirees seeking an active life? Definitely--there is part- or full-time work, volunteer work, and continuing education, often with low cost or free tuition. Many companies and unions now help the imminent retiree, as do agencies and governmental branches offering everything from workshops and courses through monthly lessons to video cassettes, pamphlets, and magazines. An active, meaningful retirement, viewed with anticipation, would seem to be an opportunity well worth planning for. (Two pages list sources of further information, programs, organizations, and help for those about to retire.) (CP)

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PRE-RETIREMENT PLANNING: A NECESSARY DRESS REHEARSAL

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PRE-RETIREMENT PLANNING: A NECESSARY DRESS REHEARSAL

As a society, America is future-oriented. We mortgage the present for the future, invest in our children, expect the future to be even better than the present. The only gap in our frantic planning for the future is our strange lack of preparation for the inevitable fact of retirement. As birth rates decline and life spans lengthen, America faces a social dilemma: in the near future, there will probably be more people retiring from the labor force than entering it. The millions of workers who retire every year have, until now, been given very little help in planning for what may be a significant time in their lengthened life-span. What has been missing are established "roles" for older people, comparable to the roles available for every other stage of adult life. If the retiree wants something other than what has been termed the "roleless role" of the retired, it is important to plan for the creation of those new roles. In fact, studies seem to indicate (Weinstein, 1979) that <u>preparation</u> for retirement is the key to its success.

Planning combined with certain principles of effective retirement would seem to offer the best guarantee of a successful and graceful retirement. These basic ingredients for a successful retirement include the following:

1. <u>Care of health</u> - The maintaining of regular health habits of diet, rest and exercise are the most important substructure of a successful retirement.

2. <u>Role flexibility</u> - The person retiring must be able to see (or must be helped to see) himself or herself in a role other than that of the work setting or job title. In other words, the retiree must have a healthy self-image, not one entirely bound to the image of self - as - worker.

3. Activity - Not surprisingly, most happily retired people find some constructive and meaningful activity to occupy them, suitable to their health and energy level. This activity can be volunteer work, hobbies, crafts or recreation; The importance is that it be absorbing and rewarding to the person.

4. Maintenance of social life - Some social ties must be maintained, with peers and with others. This poses a difficulty for the person who has relied on work to provide both colleagues and friends. The basic human need to enjoy normal companionship does not disappear in retirement, and are only partially met by Senior Citizens' Centers, which only provide contact with other elderly.

Research on "Adjustment" to retirement tends to disprove some of the reigning myths about retirement in America (Weinstein, 1979). Perhaps the most prevailing myth is that which suggests that retirement itself results in poorer physical health, aggravated mental health decline or even death. On the contrary, today people are retiring earlier and living longer. It is not unusual for someone to spend a quarter of his or her life in retirement. Most significant in maintaining mental and physical health are pre-retirement planning, one's self-image and how important the job is as a source of one's intrinsic satisfaction.

Another popular myth is that all retirees move. Only 5% of retirees actually move to another area, although many more discuss the possibility before actually retiring. Perhaps the most prevalent (and devestating) misconception is that retirement is the inevitable precursor of poverty. A recent national council on aging survey found that only 15% of the population over 60 was having serious financial problems. However, it is only realistic for an individual to be concerned with the inevitable restriction of income which most retirements occasion. The destructive impact of inflation on financial security is doubly ravaging for the retired because no power of continued service stands behind the receipt of a pension, an annuity or even social security. Moreover, in a culture in which growth is the norm, a stable

income represents a source of discomfort as well as an actual loss of purchasing power. In financial as well as other areas of retirement, planning ahead is the key to successful adjustment.

A final myth is that retirement is a major source of stress and mental illness. While retirement in itself need not be, often the anticipation of it and the attitudes toward it in our society can be. One way to alleviate pre-retirement anxiety is, of course, by planning thoughtfully and carefully for it, by staging a kind of dress rehearsal for retirement.

How can this "dress rehearsal" be enacted? The secret to it is gradual "phasing into" retirement rather than an abrupt and dislocating change in lifestyle. Pre-retirees can begin to spend more leisure time with the hobbies or recreational activities they intend to pursue in retirement in order to see if they really enjoy them.

Peer counseling, as some companies have learned, can be most helpful in pre-retirement planning. In such programs, often sponsored by businesses for their employees, retirees are used as a kind of reference and resource group to "teach" retirement to those who are still in the planning stages.

A third possible rehearsal step toward a more graceful retirement is for pre-retirees to assess their income and financial needs after retirement. In order to adjust budgets and prevent (or at least minimize) the trauma of a sudden shift in income, they can practice living on a retirement income even while working on the job. Weinstein, 1979, cautions against the psychological money traps awaiting the unprepared retiree, such as the plight of the workers who spend their productive years saving for retirement and then find themselves unwilling to part with any of their savings. This pitfall, too, can be avoided if peer counseling advises pre-

retirees of the financial and psychological changes often inherent in the retirement process.

But, what is all this dress rehearsal, all this pre-retirement planning for? Specifically, are there any options now open to retirees who want to be active? Plenty, according to available information. A partial sampling indicating the variety of these options follows:

Twenty-eight percent of all 65 to 69 year-olds work as volunteers and almost half a million people over 65 are enrolled in some sort of educational program, such as the recent national "Elderhostel" movement, active on many summer college campuses. Some state universities offer the elderly college week programs and free tuition arrangements.

Often, part and fulltime paying jobs are also available in local communities. The National Council on Aging has proposed a model community action program to employ older people as aides to work with children in hospitals, pre-school programs, schools for the retarded, day camps and nurseries. The Foster Grandparent Program has achieved widespread visibility as a source of community service benefiting both the elderly poor and the children served in this imaginative program. One of the more promising developments of recent years has been Project SCORE (Service Corps of Retired Executives) who lend their considerable expertise to new or floundering small businesses. The Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP), funded by ACTION, is a national program planned and operated at the local level. The elderly may volunteer as friendly visitors to shut-ins, as teacher aides, as employment counselors or as companions to institutionalized children.

These are, as indicated, only a small if representative, sampling of the opportunities for work, volunteer activity and continuing education open to the elderly and retired. As it seems, retirement can open up a whole new life, but

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to do so requires some advance preparation and planning. Where is help for such planning available?

Pre-retirement programs may be originated by union officials, union members, company officials, community agencies, recent retirees or any of the many agencies concerned with the elderly. Subjects for seminars sponsored by such programs include Social Security and Medicare; legal, financial and housing problems, health and nutrition; consumer problems; use of leisure time and volunteer activity. (Baumhover and Jones, 1977). Specific help in locating established retirement - planning courses is available; here are some of the agencies involved, as listed in HEW's "Planning for Retirement: Some Sources of Information" (1978):

1. Several courses are sponsored by Action for Independent Maturity (AIM), an organization specifically for employed persons, ages 50-65, who are preparing for retirement. The organization is a branch of the American Association of Retired Persons, and offers membership to individuals, corporations, institutions, government agencies and businesses. AIM's address is 1909 K St., NW, Washington, D.C. 20049

2. The American Management Associations National Center for Career Life Planning in New York City offers a do-it yourself planning program called "You Can Change Your Future". The center also sponsors one-day life planning conferences in various cities for people over 40. Write the Center at 135 West 50th Street, New York, N.Y. 10020

3. The Bureau of Business Practices offers a set of 24 monthly lessons mailed to subscribers to a Retirement Planning Workshop. Address: 24 Ferry Road, Waterford, Ct. 06386

4. The Manpower Education Institute has prepared a "Ready or Not" TV series of ten 30-minute video cassettes in color on pre-retirement planning topics accompanied by a guidebook. The Institute can be reached at 127 East 35th St., New York, N.Y. 10016

5. The National Council on Aging (NCOA) has developed a program package in cooperation with a group of major corporations and unions that employers may find useful in adapting for their own pre-retirement program. NCOA will also send specialists to individual businesses to conduct a retirement program. NCOA is located at 1828 L St., NW, Washington, D.C. 20036

For those for whom a complete pre-retirement course is impractical, considerable literature is available on the subject. Guides and pamphlets are available from the

following organizations:

6. The National Retired Teachers' Association (NRTA) and the AARP have prepared fifteen guides for programs. They can be contacted at 1909 K St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20049

7. AIM has a series of guides and panphlets to assist in retirement planning and provide information. AIM, 1909 K St., NW, Washington, D.C., 20049

8. Retirement Living Magazine, 850 Third Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10022 has a series of guides, including budget and inventory forms.

9. The American Council of Life Insurance, 1850 K St., NW, Washington, D.C. 20049, has developed publications on pensions, life and health insurance..

Many colleges and universities offer resources in planning for retirement.

Among them are:

10. The University of Chicago, which publishes a brochure describing services offered to the retired at 1225 East 60th St., Chicago, Il. 60637.

11. The Institute of Gerontology at the University of Michigan conducts studies and provides consultation to groups starting pre-retirement programs, and can be contacted at 520 East Liberty, Ann Arbor, Mi. 48109.

12. The University of Southern California's Gerontology Center conducts research on approaches to pre-retirement education and life-planning at Andrus Gerontology Center, USC, Los Angeles, CA. 90007.

Labor unions, too, are playing a vital role in providing resources in pre-retirement planning. Two of the larger unions are providing leadership in the field:

13. In 1964 the Chrysler Corporation of Detroit and the United Automobile Workers started a pre-retirement counseling program for Chrysler employees, with the assistance of the Institute of Gerontology, University of Michigan. Between 1965 and 1973, about 15% of active employees over the age of 53 participated, many with their spouses, in seven two-hour sessions on living arrangements, benefits, financial planning and leisure time. Information on programs is available from the UAW, Dave Miller Retired Worker Center, 8731 East Jefferson, Detroit, MI. 48214.

14. The United Steelworkers of America began pre-retirement planning activities for members in 1956. The union has now developed ten video cassette presentations on topics of interest to retirees. For information, contact the Director, Department of Older and Retired Workers, United Steelworkers of America, 815 16th St., NW, Washington, D.C. 20006.

The Federal, State and local government is another source for help in retirement planning. The Consumer Information Center of the General Services Administration offers booklets on topics of consumer and retirees' interests, from travel to health, from leisure activities to Social Security. These booklets were developed by various Federal departments and most are free. Local governments are active as well; many in large cities give regular workshops and seminars on retirement planning.

Conclusion

Although almost twenty-three million people are currently of retirement age, (and their number is growing yearly), no more than one-quarter to one-half of them reach retirement with a sense of pleasurable anticipation. What is the difference between those who look forward to retirement and those who don't? Among other factors (including such important variables as job status and identity, and whether or not retirement is voluntary), is that of realistic planning for such a major change in life style. Those who view retirement with anticipation, as a chance for time and freedom to pursue their goals seem to be those who have taken time and effort for such life planning. An active, meaningful retirement would seem to be an opportunity well worth planning for.

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Suggested Sources for Further Information

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